

BELMONT MILL, UPPER OUTHOUSE

(Nevada Belmont Mill)

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Approximately 7 miles south of U.S. Route 50 on USDA Forest

Service Road No. 623

Ely vicinity

White Pine County

Nevada

HAER NV-46-O

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

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HAER No. NV-46-O

Location: Approximately 7 miles south of U.S. Route 50 on USDA Forest Service Road No. 623, Ely vicinity, White Pine County, Nevada.
U.S. Geological Survey, Seligman Canyon, Nevada, 7.5 Quadrangle (1992), Township 16 North, Range 57 East, Section 1.
UTM Zone 11, Easting 2060499.08, Northing 14267220.67 (southwest corner of building) (NAD 83).
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Feature No. F10.

Significance: The Tonopah Belmont Development Company (TBDC) was one of the most important companies created during Nevada's early twentieth-century mining boom. As ore deposits in its central Nevada mines were depleted, the company sought new claims to resurrect its fortunes. In 1926 TBDC built the Belmont Mill near Hamilton to process lead and silver ore from its recently acquired claims in the White Pine mining district of eastern Nevada. The small pilot mill employed the most recent advances in table concentration and flotation mineral processing techniques, and the company erected numerous other buildings and structures to support the mining and milling work. The site was largely abandoned by TBDC after a few years, but later owners used the mill and associated structures for smaller operations. Today, although most of the equipment has been removed, the Belmont Mill site is one of the only intact early twentieth-century mill complexes in eastern Nevada. Importantly, many of the domestic buildings and structures remain to provide a glimpse of daily life there, including relatively ephemeral buildings like the upper outhouse. The mill complex is a tangible reminder of the decline and failure of a once-powerful company and, thereby, of the boom and bust cycle so common in the mining industry. The subsequent modification and reuse of the site for small-scale operations typifies the ceaseless hum of optimism that sustains the mining industry.

Description: The one-room upper outhouse is located on the hillside northwest of the mill (NV-46-A), along the access road that begins in the canyon bottom and winds up the small drainage on the north end of the site. The outhouse was constructed into the steep hillside about eight feet north of the upper boardinghouse (NV-46-N), which was built on the roadbed and became the terminus for the graded road that originally contoured along the hillside and probably provided access to the water tank (NV-46-S) during its construction.

The rectangular outhouse measures about 5' north to south and 2' east to west. It has no foundation and the floor is of dirt. White-painted sheets of plywood form the east and west walls; a third sheet of plywood forms the interior face of the north wall, but this is backed by a steel plate (perhaps originally a door on a piece of equipment or machinery –

a hinge is still attached) that serves as a retaining wall for the hill behind it. The flat roof comprises 1-1/2" x 3-1/2" joists (which also act as braces for the east and west wall tops) with screening nailed to the top and remnants of asphalt roll roofing nailed over that. No toilet seat or bench remains and the door on the south side is missing.

History: See the Narrative Overview in HAER No. NV-46 for a broad contextual history.

The upper outhouse is an accessory building to the upper boardinghouse and is best understood in the context of that building. The west part of the upper boardinghouse may have been built by TBDC in 1926 as one of four residences originally on the site; the other three were removed by 1939 (see NV-46-N for further discussion). In ca. 1940, a photograph was taken facing roughly due north that provides a view of many of the mill site buildings, including a residence on the access road northwest of the mill that appears to the residence that became the upper boardinghouse (before the east addition was made).

As early as 1945, Andrew Dowd, a mining engineer, and his wife Ermyl lived at the site, perhaps as employees of the owner or as unofficial lessees, and also as caretakers.¹ After Andrew's death sometime after 1956, Ermyl continued to live at the site and worked as caretaker for the claimholder, Don Jennings. By the 1960s she made her home in the kitchen of the lower boardinghouse, where she also kept an upright piano; she had reportedly been a vaudeville performer in her younger days. Beginning at this time and perhaps earlier, she rented rooms and provided meals in the boardinghouse to miners working nearby claims, a practice she continued until the middle 1970s to supplement the limited income from her own mining claims.² There is no indication that anyone used or lived in the upper boardinghouse during this time, thus there would have been no need for an outhouse.

In the 1970s Mrs. Dowd married Carl Tillman, the caretaker for a nearby property and a man thirty years her junior. In the mid-1970s the couple moved from the lower boardinghouse to the residence behind the mill, and it was probably at this time that they built both the east addition to the residence and the upper outhouse; the construction quality and materials of the latter also support this date. Given the size and open floor plan of the addition, it seems likely that the couple lived in the original residence and used the east addition for boarders, and the outhouse was sited just outside the addition's north door for convenience. In the late 1970s or even as late as 1980 (perhaps when the property changed hands and Jennings no longer paid a caretaker's fee), Dowd and Tillman moved to Ely, where the latter worked at the Hotel Nevada.³ The outhouse

¹ Interviews with Hal Jensen and Hal (Rod) Jensen, Jr., 1 October 2010. Andrew Dowd was mentioned definitively in association with the Belmont mine in 1956. See L. E. Davis et al., "The Mineral Industry of Nevada," in US Bureau of Mines Minerals Yearbook Area Reports, 1956, Vol. III (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1958), 761.

² Interview with Hal (Rod) Jensen, Jr.

³ Ibid., and interview with Ronald Jordan, 29 September 2010. Tillman died in the early 1990s on the dance floor of the casino and Dowd probably died several years before that.

would have fallen into disuse at this time. The building is presently in poor condition due to the loss of most of the roofing, the deterioration or removal of the door and interior fixtures, and the continued pressure of the hill slope that has caused displacement of the east and west walls.

Sources: See HAER No. NV-46.

Historian: Anne Oliver, Principal, Oliver Conservation Group. Fieldwork for the project was conducted in the fall of 2010. Project documentation was accepted by HABS/HAER in 2011.

Project Information: See HAER No. NV-46 for complete details. In summary, this project was completed under a contract between the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and a consulting team under the direction of ajc architects (Salt Lake City, Utah), in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. The project historian was Anne Oliver, historic preservation consultant with Oliver Conservation Group. Matt Wallace, intern architect with ajc architects, was responsible for the architectural measured drawings and completed all fieldwork and final drawings with the assistance of Oliver Smith Callis, draftsman. The photography was produced by Steve Tregeagle Photography under the direction of Steve Tregeagle and with the assistance of Heath Brown.